

The Concept
and Army Religious Education

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To those who enrolled in the Chaplain's Assistant course, any reference to the novel Catch 22 elicits a humorous response. Particularly when we think of the Chaplain's Assistant in the book, who so effectively manages his Chaplain's mind. As one of my friends told me, "Don't corrupt too many Chaplains, will you?"

More significant in Catch 22 is the effort of the Chaplain to convince his Commanding Officer of the blatant truth: That enlisted men worship the same God as officers. The military establishment, with its stratified disciplines, makes such a potential hazard possible. This chasm is, by necessity, as well as by constitutional authority, bridged in the religious program of the military services, despite the particular beliefs of the CO. The Army concept of Religious Education is based quite soundly on worship services, communion, Sunday school, fellowship groups, and so on. However, the number of personnel in the Army precludes a qualitative representation of denominations, in many cases. Subsequently, the unified curriculum was developed, which offends no-one in particular. Of far overriding significance however, is the mission of the military Chaplaincy to provide for the moral and religious welfare, as well as the morale, of the personnel of the military establishment. As we are all familiar with the areas of Religious Education offered for military children, we will devote the rest of the exercise to the areas of Adult Religious Education in keeping with the Chaplaincy role. To quote from the Staff Study by

Chaplain Bertram C. Gilert (1960); "We are concerned in the military with adults from 17 to 60. The total U.S. population in this group is now 107, 708,00 persons of all sexes. This represents 59% of the total population (181) million. ^YAnyone familiar with an Army Post will know that our percentage of adults will come nearer to 80%. For specific illustration however we will cite Ft. Belvoir, Va. which had an on-post percentage of 83% as of 10 October 1960. In other words no matter how full the maternity ward is at your post hospital, the odds are that you still in a community which is 20% more adult than average."¹

In this quotation we can see the first contrast between the military and civilian communities. That of congregation. With approximately $3\frac{1}{2}$ to 4% of the adult population in the military community, we have a sample large enough to get the diverse education levels in an approximation of the whole--both as religious education, and academic level. Since the military population is spread geographically to such an extent, we are left with the physical impossibility of providing denominational diversity in character similar to the civilian community. That is point two. Third, we are given to the short duration of tour which precludes extensive study, on a standardized level. Subsequently intensive study groups are the immediate alternative, as contrasted to the civilian counterpart. Chaplain Gilbert concurs with this notion in his suggestion of short, intensive courses in religious education.

Fourthly, since we have already narrowed our group to an adult sample, we can analyze what must be emphasized in our curriculum. Let us begin with another quote: "The adult student comes with quite a different purpose. He has already adapted his personality more or less successfully to his environment... He knows ~~the~~ patterns of his culture. In fact he comes because he wished to acquire some power to change them."²

The reader will recall that we are not ignoring the role or instructing children of dependents (nor wives of military personnel, who are included in our sample, of course). The Army concept of Religious Education finds immediate difficulty in the obtaining of its congregation. Since free time is more limited in the military, competition for it is much keener. And, almost as significant, the resistance to the attractions of Religious Education groups is keener. I found that Chaplain Gilbert supports my ideas of this resistance, which comes as a result of being thought of as overly religious by the soldiers peers, as he sneaks from the barracks (or BQ).

Certainly the contrast should be evident, as we have developed it. The difficulties have been discussed, and relevant observations made from both the military and civilian communities. The acquisition of a participating congregation is more difficult in the military, but those obtained are of an age level where the challenge of keeping one 23 year-old is far greater than that of Sunday school for two 11½ year-olds. In that sense, the military Chaplaincy could provide a more rewarding congregational life for the Chaplain than the civilian counterpart. Unless, of course, the local neighborhood CA has too much control of the Chaplain's mind!

End

FOOTNOTES

- 1Gilbert, Bertram G. Protestant Instruction in Religion⁹
2Lyman, Bryson, Adult Education, A Perspective

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Protestant Instruction in Religion. Chaplain Bertram C. Gilbert, 1960